

Memo

**The Possibility of an Early Major Viet
Minh Attack in Indochina**

14 March 1951

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14 March 1951

MEMORANDUM OF INFORMATION NO. 36

FOR: National Estimates Board

SUBJECT: The Possibility of an Early Major Viet Minh Attack in Indochina

[redacted] reports of a Viet Minh decision and plan to attack French lines in Tonkin between 15 and 20 March. [redacted] stated it was confirmed by Viet Minh troop movements and [redacted] CIA has received independently, but probably from the same original source, similar details of an alleged Viet Minh plan to launch a major attack between 15 and 20 March. In the past several weeks, CIA has also received numerous less specific reports from sources of unknown reliability to the effect that a Viet Minh offensive is expected "soon".

Although these reports cannot be considered conclusive, it is logical that the Viet Minh will attempt another attack in Tonkin before the May monsoons and before the French position can be strengthened by the arrival and integration of French reinforcements and additional US equipment. An early attack, however, would depend on the state of Viet Minh military preparations. Viet Minh strength has increased in Tonkin by some 20,000 and the current disposition of Viet Minh forces would permit the attacks which appear to be planned with little additional movement of troops. It would appear, therefore, that the governing factor in the timing of a Viet Minh attack will be the extent to which the Viet Minh has overcome, through Chinese assistance, shortages in essential equipment, particularly artillery. Field reports are in conflict on the extent of actual delivery of equipment, but [redacted] feels certain, [redacted] that delivery of artillery has lagged. For this reason, he believes Viet Minh operations cannot begin before 25 March.

As has been the case for over a year, field reports continue to state the intervention of Chinese forces is imminent. Some weight has been added to such a possibility by [redacted] which accepts the presence of 30,000 Chinese Communist regulars in Tonkin. CIA has also received a report from an untested source with claimed access to the Viet Minh Command stating that an all-out Viet Minh attack in Tonkin in early March will be supported by 20,000 Chinese Communist regulars now in Tonkin and by naval and air units based on Hainan. Numerous other reports do not mention participation of

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regular Chinese forces but state Peiping has agreed to organize and arm volunteer units to aid Viet Minh troops. One such report states that Peiping has ordered the assembling and arming of six regiments near the Indochina border by the end of February for the "Anti-French and Indochinese Volunteer Corps."

[] does not accept the presence of any Chinese Communist regulars in Tonkin and [] is "fairly sure" that the Chinese will not send troops to participate in the March Viet Minh attack. [] concurs with the appreciation of [] however, that the Chinese might commit a limited number of "volunteer" troops and if this met with some success (possible meaning if it did not draw strong US reaction), they might then follow through with full-scale participation. At the same time, however, CIA has received reports stating the Chinese troops will not actively participate if US troops do not intervene, and [] in Indochina claims that Viet Minh and Chinese Communist representatives have agreed that Chinese Communist forces will not invade Indochina "for the present."

[] has hopes of repulsing the Viet Minh attack with the forces now available [] and believed there is even the possibility of so mauling the Viet Minh that they would be unable to launch another full-scale attack in Tonkin without the aid of Chinese Communist troops.

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